

School library support for students with Special Educational Needs

— A comparison of libraries at two Special Schools in Japan —

Education Department, Bukkyo University, Kyoto Hiroyo MATSUDO

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine ways that school libraries are becoming more involved in Special Needs education. To do so, the author sets three tasks: (1) To clarify the kind of special support needed for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN); (2) To examine the kinds of special support actually being provided to student library users at two special schools; and (3) To determine the skills needed by professional school library personnel to provide this special support.

As a method, the kinds of special support provided by two Special School libraries are compared, in particular the type of special support associated with reasonable accommodation. Library staff at both of the schools examined foster student independence in learning and use assistive technology (AT) in their library environment.

The following practices were found to improve the school library experience for SEN students: (1) Organization of special needs materials in ways that improve accessibility; (2) Provision of suitable student-focused, visualized resources by library staff to assist library users to locate materials; (3) Providing procedures or worksheets to educate and equip library users proactively; and (4) Supporting the self-affirmation of SEN students by having library staff provide sympathetic assistance and understanding.

Regarding the skills necessary for professional school library personnel to provide sufficient support for SEN students, for both teacher librarians and school librarians the fundamental requirement is to understand the characteristics of various disabilities and the stage of development of the students, as well as the ability to provide visualized services through AT tools such as the accessible, multimedia DAISY initiative.

Key Words : school library, special support, students with SEN, visualization, assistive technology

1 Introduction

1.1 Special education in Japan

According to a survey by Japan's Ministry

of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2002¹, the percentage of students who have remarkable difficulty in learning and behavior in public elementary and

junior high schools is 6.5%. In order to develop a system to support these students, guidelines were established in 2003², and in April 2007, language supporting Special Needs Education was inserted into Japan's School Education Law for the first time. In 2013, the "Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities" (also referred to as "The Elimination of Disability Discrimination Act") was enacted, and was scheduled to come into force on April 1, 2016. Under this law, national or public schools must provide reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities as a legal obligation. Private schools are also required to make efforts to provide reasonable accommodation for these students. School libraries are also expected to provide reasonable accommodation to students, since students with SEN use these libraries daily.

1.2 School library staff

Regarding the staffing of school libraries, a teacher librarian and a school librarian are to operate, elementary, junior high school and high school libraries in Japan, under the "School Library Act". However, the ratio of school librarian is around 50% in 2015.

1.2.1 Teacher librarians

Teacher librarians are librarians who have completed five courses (ten units) listed in the "Provision of Training Courses for Teacher Librarians of School Libraries" and who have been appointed as a teacher librarian. Their task is to position the school library in the educational process so that other teachers understand the function of the school library and the role of the school librarian. In order to

carry out their duties and organize materials, school management staff can be consulted and negotiated with.

1.2.2 School librarians

School librarians are personnel who are exclusively engaged in administration of a school library, as well as the promotion of the further use of the library by students and teachers. They are required to have expertise relating to information resources and to be able to assist students after determining a student's individual needs.

1.3 Literature review

Murray (2000³, 2002⁴) has reported on the contributions that school libraries can make to the educational process in Australia. Case studies were developed based on questionnaires, interviews, observations and literature analyses involving 15 schools in Victoria and New South Wales in 1994 and 1996.

School libraries have a special role in promoting information literacy among students, including the use of information technology (IT) through use of the internet, CDs, etc., including students with Special Educational Needs (hereafter referred to as "students with SEN"). School libraries can be accessed by anyone and can assist in the lifelong learning and development of students with SEN. Furthermore, they can contribute to promoting the education of students with SEN through the use of SEN materials selected by school librarians who are experts on these materials. School librarians also let students perform routine library tasks which suit the students' personalities. By participating in library work, students with

SEN are able to improve their self-confidence.

Before examining Japan's school library system, we need to clarify the ways in which Japanese schools support teacher librarians and school librarians. In 2007, Takenori Noguchi conducted a survey of Special Support school libraries and received 568 responses.⁵ The survey included IT topics such as utilization of the internet, CDs, etc. According to Noguchi's survey, 39.0% of the school libraries surveyed were equipped with computers that could be connected to the Internet and allowed to perform searches, with an average of 2.1 computers installed in each school library. 71.9% of the school libraries surveyed contained audiovisual and electronic media. The top three types of audiovisual and electronic media available were cassette tapes, videotapes, and picture-story shows. CD-ROM material was also available. However, no DAISY multimedia material was available at these schools in 2007.

Noguchi also found that only 12.8% of these schools required courses on the utilization of the school library in their curriculum. The main subjects which involved use of school libraries were "Japanese Language", "Society", "Comprehensive Learning Time", "Special Activities" and "Living Unit Learning". Through this survey we can grasp an outline of the functions of school libraries in Japan, however, Noguchi's study did not directly mention the issue about how special support for students with SEN is done.

In March 2017, MEXT revised Japan's "Primary School Course of Study" and recommended that utilization of the school library be included in the new elementary school curriculum guidelines.⁶ To support child

development, it also encouraged utilization of digital boards, digital textbooks and digital teaching materials, etc., since computer information is also an effective means of individualized education. The new guidelines also required schools to provide students with SEN with more assistance, such as distribution of worksheets showing the procedure needed to complete class activities, additional notes and pictures, etc. If school libraries are also to provide additional support for these students, we need to ask, "What kind of additional support, specifically, should be provided in school libraries at special support schools?"

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide some concrete suggestions on how school libraries can become more involved in assisting Special Needs Education. In summary, the research tasks addressed in this study are as follows:

- (1) To clarify the type of special support to be provided by school libraries to students with SEN.
- (2) To examine what kinds of special support is actually being provided in libraries at Special Needs schools.
- (3) To determine the current personnel requirements for professional school library personnel who will be providing this special support.

1.5 Definition of terms

1.5.1 Special support

Special support refers to individualized consideration, planning and provision of assistance based on the unique needs of

particular students. It is an educational concept based not on addressing diagnosed disabilities, but on providing Special Educational Support in accordance with individual needs, a concept is based on the Warnock report of 1978.⁷

1.5.2 Reasonable accommodation

The term “reasonable accommodation” was used in the “Americans with Disabilities Act” of 1990. In that context, it was a policy stipulated to requiring employers prepare means so that employees and job applicants perform to adapt their the business practices to some extent in order to achieve higher rates of employment of the disabled without any trouble. In 2006, “reasonable accommodation” was included as a principle in Article 2 of the United Nations’ “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

In response to passage of the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, the Working Group on High School Education of Japan’s Central Council for Education defined “reasonable accommodation” as “necessary and appropriate modification and accommodation carried out by establishers of schools and schools themselves where necessary in particular cases and depending on the circumstances of children with disabilities”. For example, the “reasonable accommodation” of a student who, as the result of a learning disability, is not good at performing with mathematical calculations would be allowing that student to use an electronic calculator.

Since individual needs must be taken into consideration in these situations, “special support” and “reasonable accommodation” are similar concepts, however the effective range

of “reasonable accommodation” is not limited to the field of education. Therefore, in this article on the educational system, the term of “special support” is used instead.

2 Methods

2.1 Comparison of case studies

By comparing the special support provided at two Special School libraries, in particular support focused on making it easier for students with SEN to utilize library resources, this study hopes to discover examples of practical assistance being provided to these students. The two schools examined in this study are “School A”, a university special support school, and “School B”, a municipal comprehensive support school. Staff at both of these school libraries foster student independence in learning and provide an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environment.

2.2 Overview of the two school libraries

At the university school for children with special needs (hereafter referred to as “School A”), there were 42 intellectually disabled students enrolled, ranging in educational level from elementary school to high school. The number of faculty and staff was 32 (as of May 2015). One librarian teacher and one part-time school librarian (17 hours per week) were employed in the school library, which held about 3,000 books. A “working room” was attached as a reading space for students who have difficulty reading printed books. The room contained four personal computers which enabled students to view audio-visual materials and Multimedia DAISY materials (M-DAISY),

Table 1. Overview of the two school libraries

Schools Items	A: University Special Support School	B: Municipal Comprehensive Support School
Number of enrolled students (elementary to high school)	42 (with intellectual disabilities)	189 (with intellectual, physical, visual and hearing disabilities)
Number of faculty and staff	32 (May 2015)	127 (teachers, 2015)
Library staff	Teacher librarian 1 School librarian 1 (17 hours per week: employed by University)	Teacher librarian (also has a teaching position) 1 School library support staff 1 (once a week: employed by Board of Education)
Collection	3,000 books Audio-visual materials Multimedia DAISY	Collection 7,261 (including 61 donated books) Audio-visual materials
Notes	Working room Four PCs	5 iPads

such as DVDs, and to search the internet.

The municipal comprehensive support school (hereafter referred to as “School B”) had 189 students ranging in level from elementary school to high school. In addition to students with intellectual disabilities, some students were physically disabled, visually impaired or hearing impaired. The school employed 127 teachers (as of 2015). The school’s library was staffed with one librarian teacher (who also had a teaching position) and one part-time school library support assistant (once a week). The ICT environment of School B was highly developed thanks to the school’s information education chief and an ICT instructor, who were supervised by an outside lecturer in charge of ICT. For example, the school library

had five iPad tablet computers which students could use at any time. The library contained 7,261 books, including 61 donated books.

Despite the obvious differences in the number of students and faculty and the size of the two schools, many similarities could be observed in the special support provided by the school libraries of the two schools, which will be described as we proceed with the our analysis.

3 Results

3.1 Characteristics of special support at School A

Four notable special support practices were observed in the school library at School A, all of which were based on meeting the individual needs of students through teamwork and the sharing of expertise:

- (1) Providing class support by assisting students to utilize the library to achieve coursework objectives, such as during inquiry learning.
- (2) Supporting voluntary free reading.
- (3) Making “reading records” for students in order to assess their actual reading activity.
- (4) Organizing alternative format materials for easy accessibility.

3.1.1 Class support

a. “Path finders” and rewritten materials

The teacher librarian and school librarian, in consultation with students’ homeroom teachers, made “path finders” and rewrote class materials to support inquiry learning.

During an inquiry learning exercise for junior high school level students about the highlights of their prefecture, students

investigated products made of Japanese paper. Students were assisted in their research by library staff who created a “path finder” which included keywords, search terms, document titles and other clues to enable the students themselves to locate the information resources they needed for their research.

Rewritten materials are easy to understand documents created by library staff, which are based on general documents or newspaper articles whose contents are difficult for students to read.

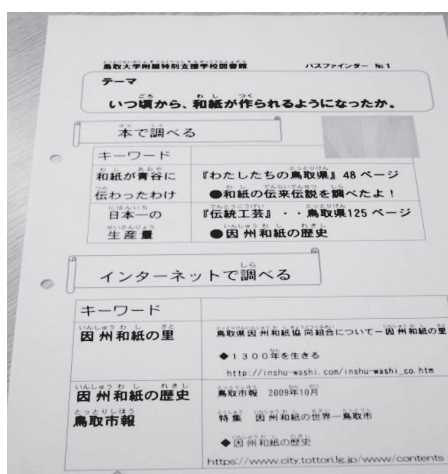


Photo 1. Research “path finder” created by school library staff

b. Research procedures

Furthermore, when assisting with inquiry learning, the librarians provided support for students by providing research procedure tables and worksheets on how to conduct inquiry learning, as well as instructing students how to use a digital camera and other IT tools for their projects.

In addition, by making school librarians a contact point for information resources, students were able to obtain descriptive materials that

met their actual research needs, such as photos and paintings contained in materials obtained by school librarians from public libraries through interlibrary loan.

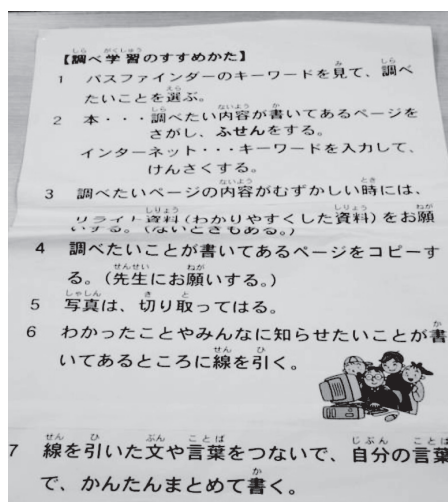


Photo 2. Research procedure worksheet provided by library staff

3.1.2 Support for voluntary free reading

School librarians understand students' actual interests as well as their reading levels, and are able to help students select appropriate books for their own enjoyment. In addition, as librarians they strive to meet students' requests without fail.

For example, a school librarian at School A said she had recommended the junior version of a book entitled “A Child Called ‘It’”⁸ to a high school student who had never read an entire book, and who had visited the school library in order to talk with the school librarian. Following the librarian's recommendation, the student found the book interesting enough to read volumes 1 to 3.

In addition, school librarians usually read large picture books to students during their

lunch break, in order to spark their interest in reading.

3.1.3 “Reading records”

In order to provide individualized support according to needs of each student, school librarians created a “reading record” for each student. Surveys on students’ interests were conducted with their parents in advance, and homeroom teachers updated the records by taking into situations of student reading at school.

The contents of “reading records” included level of interest in reading and in watching DVDs, actual print reading habits, comprehension ability, frequency of visits to public libraries, etc. School librarians used these “reading records” to assist them with book selection and book introduction for students.

3.1.4 Improvement of material organization

In order to enable students with SEN to access information resources proactively, school library staff improved the organization of their Special Needs materials. Illustrations and ruby characters (furigana) were included in classification headings on items and shelves. School library staff also used pictograms, illustrations or animal mascots on top of bookshelves (to help students find materials on animals), while also retaining the Nippon Decimal Classification system.

In addition, an M-DAISY corner was organized for the M-DAISY books donated by the Ito-chu Memorial Foundation. Each work was displayed separately, and a picture or photo was placed on the cover of each case to encourage students to choose books and others

materials proactively (Photo 3).



Photo 3. Multimedia DAISY corner



Photo 4. Helping students visualize phrases with pictograms

3.2 Characteristics of special support at School B

School library staff at School B noted that the role of a school library is to encourage students to increase their independent educational activity and become lifelong learners. Four notable special support practices were observed at School B:

- (1) Student initiated activities related to the school library, which included:
 - a. Personal use of the library’s resources by students during their lunch breaks.
 - b. Activities organized by the student library committee utilizing AT (assistive technology) equipment.
- (2) Library maps utilizing pictograms.

- (3) Organizing library materials to make information easily accessible (resource corners).
- (4) Visual aids to assist students with procedures for using AT equipment for poster making.

3.2.1 Student initiated activities in the school library

a. Personal use of the library's resources by students during their lunch breaks

One of the students who visited the library during the 25 minute lunch break was observed selecting a DVD and then wearing headphones while viewing the DVD on a large TV. Another child took down an iPad from the shelf, started apps and studied Japanese characters. A third child selected a picture book from the bookshelf and read it. Each of these children selected and used a media tool in the school library on their own initiative.



Photo 5. Digital board

b. Activities organized by the student library committee utilizing AT equipment

The student library committee of the high school introduced books to the other students by making posters about their recommended books utilizing AT equipment and posting

them (Photo 6).

Another activity targeted students who were unable to visit the school library during their lunch break due to physical disabilities or other reasons. The high school student library committee visited the classrooms of the elementary and junior high school sections during lunch breaks and introduced books using electronic picture books stored on an iPad.

In this manner, the school library promoted barrier-free, easy access to its materials, with the help of various forms of media, to make it a place where students are able to develop their independence and communication ability.



Photo 6. Books recommended by student library assistants utilizing AT equipment

3.2.2 Library map utilizing pictograms

The library map created by the student

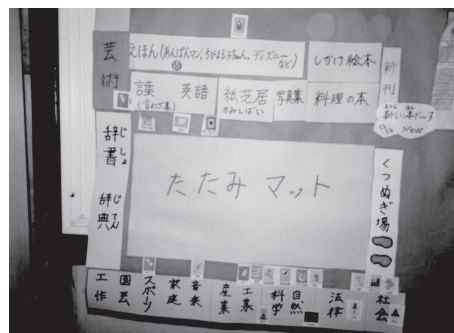


Photo 7. Library map using pictograms

library committee included ruby characters and pictograms representing abstract categories (e.g., society, law, natural science, music, and sports), making it easier to use for students with SEN.

3.2.3 Organizing library materials to make information resources easily accessible



Photo 8. Popular materials such as pop-up picture books organized into “corners”.

Resources which were used very frequently were grouped together and the shelves were identified by signs, such as “cooking”, “photo books”, “English” and “language”. Pop-up picture books and picture books in general (including Disney, Anpanman, and Chibi Maruko-chan, etc.) were also grouped together. These “corners” were marked with red tape put on the shelves so that they were easily visually identifiable.

3.2.4 Visual aids to assist students with procedures for using AT equipment for poster making

A procedure table showing students the steps for operating an AT device in order to make a poster, which included balloons of photos with text, was prepared by the student library committee with the goal of making the equipment more accessible to students.

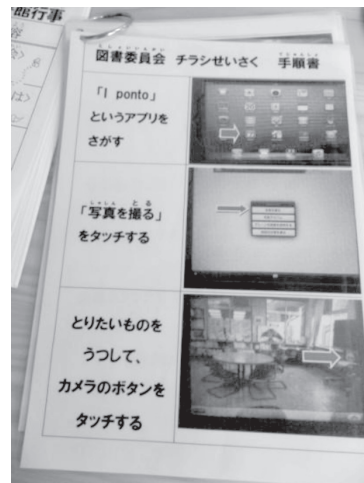


Photo 9. Poster showing students how to use AT equipment

4 Discussion

4.1 Conventional goals of library special support

Four conventional goals of library special support can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Organization of library materials to guarantee accessibility.
- (2) Creation of procedure tables or worksheets to assist students proactively with library research.
- (3) Provision of audio-visual materials and AT tools.
- (4) Emotional support for users by school library personnel.

These library special support practices are based on the goal of meeting the needs of individual students.

4.1.1 Organization of library materials to guarantee accessibility

School library staff at both School A and School B used pictograms, illustrations or animal mascots placed on top of bookshelves to

assist students with using the Nippon Decimal Classification (NDC) system. Because the NDC classification system contains a lot of abstract vocabulary, such as “Group 3 Social Sciences”, for example, it is necessary for special support libraries to use specific phrases as much as possible so that students are able to visualize these phrases through a symbol, pictogram or illustration representing the phrase. For example, the of placing an animal mascot on top of a bookshelf containing materials on animals clearly shows students with SEN where these information resources are located.

4.1.2 Creation of procedure tables or worksheets to assist student proactively with library research

Having library staff create procedure tables or worksheets is not only helpful for students with SEN, but also helps library staff be more self-aware when assisting students to learn common procedures for solving problems. These procedure tables can be placed on the wall of the library where they can be easily accessed by students.

In inquiry learning, “path finder” worksheets are also helpful, especially if they include specific keywords, search terms or document titles, as well as an explanation of what the students will learn and what information resources are available to assist them.

4.1.3 Provision of audio-visual materials and AT tools

Multimedia DAISY, digital software, quick reading books, cloth picture books and others materials were available at both schools, which students could choose from depending on their

objective or interest. M-DAISY resources are said to be effective in helping students understand content, and can be obtained through the Japanese Society for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (a public interest foundation). In addition, a cloud service called “RECUIAS transliteration editor” was also scheduled to become available as an additional method of creating M-DAISY content in 2016. Reading trackers help students avoid skipping sentences by helping them focus on their place when reading. Digital software, quick reading books, cloth picture books and other materials are also helpful for students with SEN.

4.1.4 Emotional support by school library personnel

A junior high school student with special needs once said to a librarian, “When I was an elementary school student, I was unable to return books by the return date, so it became hard for me to visit library.” Extending loan dates and chatting casually with students are things special support library staff can do so that students with SEN will visit the library without hesitation.

In addition, it is necessary to respond to students in accordance with their personal needs, by limiting the number of topics to one at a time when talking with a student, for example, or by preparing a conversion table of Japanese to Roman characters to assist them when entering characters into a computer.

4.2 Requirements for professional school library personnel working with special needs students

Requirements for both teacher librarians

and school librarians working with students with SEN can be summarized as follows:

- a. Familiarity with the characteristics of various disabilities and the stage of development of the students.
- b. A willingness to teach students how to utilize the school library, based on the personal characteristics of each student.
- c. An understanding of the concept of team support

There are limits to the amount of support that can be given by the teacher librarian and school librarian alone. From the viewpoint of team support, which is to “support children with the common goals of support persons by sharing roles”, it is necessary to achieve cooperation among special education coordinators, classroom teachers, school counselors, school nurses, management staff, ICT personnel, clerical staff, janitorial staff, local communities and parents.

For example, cooperation between home economics teachers and child care providers to help students make cloth picture books. Cooperation with an art teacher may also be possible. Support for students with special needs is provided by recognizing that each person involved with a student is themselves a support resource.

4.2.1 Teacher librarian proficiency

Measures have been taken to position the school library in the educational process so that other teachers understand the function of the school library and the role of school librarians. For example, in the case of School A, to better position the school library in the eyes of students, the teacher librarian gives joint

lessons with homeroom teachers on use of the school library. In addition, performance data on the number of books loaned and the number of references for the year, etc. is presented during the end-of-year staff meeting in order to stress the importance of the school library and the school librarians to the other teachers. Moreover, teacher librarians must be able to consult and negotiate with the school's management staff in order to obtain additional library materials.

4.2.2 School librarian proficiency

School librarians connect the library's information resources with students' needs for information and materials. To fulfill this role, they are required to have expertise relating to information resources and the ability to communicate with students and respond to their individual needs. Furthermore, it is necessary for both teacher librarians and school librarians, as a school library's specialized personnel, to instruct students on how to utilize the school library, based on the students' individual characteristics and abilities.

5 Conclusion

Based on the results described above from our case studies of School A and School B, as well as the issues addressed in our discussion, we can report four findings from our investigation of special support at school libraries at two Japanese special needs schools.

Firstly, providing suitable, visual information on the location of library resources, which takes into account students' conceptual abilities, is an effective way to improve access to library materials for students with SEN. Secondly,

providing task-specific “path finders” or procedure worksheets to special needs students proactively assists them in conducting library research tasks. Thirdly, it is important for special needs library staff to support students’ self-affirmation through sympathetic understanding. Lastly, educational support, provided as part of a team effort by school staff and the wider community, encouraging students’ to conduct self-directed library research activity.

As future tasks, we hope to observe and survey other Special Education schools to explore the effects of staffing practices on the provision of special support services.

[Notes]

- 1 MEXT. (2002). “Tsujo no gakkyu ni zaisekisuru tokubetsu na kyoikutekishien wo hitsuyotosuru jido seito ni kansuru zenkoku jittaiyousa” chosa kekka. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/054/shiryo/attach/1361231.htm. (Accessed on January 15th, 2019).
- 2 MEXT. (2003). Tokubetsu shien kyoiku no arikata ni kansuru cyousakenkyu kyoryokusya kaigi Kongo no tokubetsu shien kyoiku no arikata ni tsuite. (saisyuhokoku) 2003.3.28. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/054/shiryo/attach/1361204.htm. (Accessed January 15th, 2019).
- 3 Murray, Janet. (2000). How school librarians can contribute to the personal growth of students with disabilities. *ORANA Journal of School and Children’s Librarianship*, 38(2), p. 5-11.
- 4 Murray, Janet. (2002). The implications of inclusive schooling for schooling libraries. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 49(3), p. 301-322.
- 5 Noguchi, Takenori. (2014). Tokubetsu shien gakko ni okeru gakko toshokan no genryo(2) Shozoku

media to riyou・katsuyou wo chushin ni. *Gakko Toshokan* (767), p. 35-39. (Japanese)

- 6 MEXT. (2017). Shogakko gakushu shidou youryou kaisetsu sosoku hen. p. 103-109.
- 7 The Warnock Report (1978) Special Educational Needs. Retrieved from <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.html> (Accessed November15th, 2018).
- 8 Pelzer, Dave. A Child Called ‘It’, (Junior Version). Translation supervised by Momose, Shinobu Sony Magazines. 2006, 126 pages.

[References]

- Kimura, Yoshie. Tsutaeyo nakamae chiiki e—Tosho iinkai no torikumi yori—. Tokubetsu-Shien-Kyoiku-no-Jissen. no. 162, 2014, p. 30-31. (Japanese)
- Kojima, Yoko & Irikawa, Kayoko. Chitekina okure ga aru kodomotachinimo dokusho no tanoshisa wo! — Gakko toshokan orientation de no katsuyo wo toshite. Retrieved from http://www.itczaidan.or.jp/pdf/.../waiwai_katsuyou2_066_073.pdf. (Accessed on January 10th, 2019) (Japanese)
- Toshinori Ishikuma. Gakko Shinrigaku Kyoshi・School Counselors・Hogosha no team ni yoru shinri kyoikuteki enjoy service. Seishin-Shobo. 1999, p.151, 261.

[Additional statement]

This paper is a major revision of:

- Matsudo, Hiroyo. (2015). Shikakuka shita shien to renkei: tokubetsu na needs wo motsu jidouseito no koko no needs wo haakushi te. *The Library Journal*, 109(11), p. 704-707. (Japanese)

(まつど ひろよ 佛教大学教育学部)